

Session Two

What's Going On in the Family?

2

Session Two**What's Going On in the Family?**

The NDEP strongly encourages inviting a medical person (health care provider or certified diabetes educator) to participate in any sessions that you conduct to provide support for the discussion and to answer any specific medical questions that may arise.

Background

Poorly controlled diabetes can result in devastating complications, such as stroke, heart attack, amputation, kidney disease, blindness, and death. After a death from diabetes, surviving family members can experience many emotions that can be either punishing or empowering. Facing these emotions is an important part of the grieving process that enables people to move on to positive action. Coping with diabetes complications (e.g., amputation, blindness, or kidney failure) also involves a grieving process that is important in accepting the challenge of living with diabetes.

Objectives

1. To identify some of the emotions that family members may experience when a loved one has diabetes.
2. To identify ways that family members can help or hurt themselves in coping with complications of diabetes or a death in the family from diabetes.



Time needed for discussion: 45 to 60 minutes.

Materials

- DVD of the film *The Debilitator*.
- DVD player/TV monitor.

For instructions on borrowing *The Debilitator* film, see page 4 of this guide.

- Optional: Flipchart or blackboard for writing down key words from discussion.
- The Troubleshooting section of this guide *[for your review before leading this session]*.

Method

- Conduct a facilitated discussion (group discussion with a leader asking stimulation questions).
- Play the film, or select scenes from the film as needed.



DVD

Tell the group: Think about the funeral scene in the film *The Debilitator*. *[You may wish to replay that scene in the film to refresh participants' memories.]*

Consider using the following questions to guide the discussion:

1. **Ask the group:** How do you think Calvin's daughter Latosha feels? How do you think his son Bobby feels? How does Calvin's wife Monica feel?



Make sure that the following points are brought out in the discussion:

- Survivor guilt. Sometimes people feel guilty that they couldn't do more for the person before he or she died, and they blame themselves in a way that is not constructive.
 - Anger. This is a normal emotion that may evoke the question "Why did he leave us?"
 - Worry about financial issues.
 - Blaming the victim. This blame may lead to statements such as "He knew he wasn't taking care of himself."
2. **Ask the group:** Is there any way to turn these emotions into positive actions?



Make sure that the following points are brought out in the discussion:

- Sometimes it takes a tragedy to wake us up to the need to make changes.
- You can turn anger into action. Anger can give rise to positive resolutions, such as “There’s no way I am going to let this happen again!”
- Blaming the victim is never useful. People who develop diabetes are not “bad,” and it is not helpful to look at them and their behavior as “being good” or “being bad.” What is helpful is learning to problem-solve.
- Children may be more likely to verbalize accusatory statements such as “Why did you go and leave me?” but adults often feel this way, too. Blaming others and feeling guilty are not helpful and often prevent people from going on to more positive action.
- Just talking honestly about emotions helps. Once people have had a chance to talk about their pain and fears, they can move on to finding solutions.



3. **Ask the group:** Are any of you willing to share a story of how diabetes affected your family, and how you dealt with the emotions that arose? *[Be prepared for participants to express a lot of emotion here. Crying is OK, and it can be important in the healing process. You may want to read the Troubleshooting section in this guide before leading this discussion.]*
4. **Ask the group:** Does anybody have any suggestions about what family members can do to cope with grief when a loved one dies of diabetes?



Make sure that the following points are brought out in the discussion:

- Seek help if you are grieving. Go to a counselor, talk to your spiritual advisor or religious leader, or ask your local hospice organization for suggestions.

- Share your grief with loved ones. Don't be afraid to open up and talk.

5. **Ask the group:** Does anybody have any suggestions about what family members can do to cope when a loved one develops a serious complication from diabetes?



Make sure that the following points are brought out in the discussion:

- Accompany the person with diabetes to his or her doctor's appointments so that you can learn more.
- Ask for a referral to a physical therapist, occupational therapist, or mental health counselor to help you and your family member deal with the physical and mental stress of a diabetes complication.
- Go to a diabetes support group on your own, or with the person who has diabetes.

Resources



Share with the group the resources listed in the References and Resources section at the end of this discussion guide. Consider making photocopies of the materials in that section as handouts for each participant.